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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [CO](#)  
SUBJECT: COLOMBIA CONFLICT UPDATE - Q3'06

REF: A. BOGOTA 3814  
[1](#)B. BOGOTA 7383  
[1](#)C. BOGOTA 7893

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood  
Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

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SUMMARY  
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[1](#)1. (C) Combat continued in Meta and Antioquia, where the COLMIL aggressively battled concentrated FARC and ELN forces. The COLMIL shifted more resources to the Catatumbo region bordering Venezuela after increased FARC attacks, but has not yet established control in the area. The Southwest border with Ecuador, where all illegal armed groups grew through increased coca cultivation and trafficking, needs a larger and more sustained COLMIL presence. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) This quarterly update reviews Colombian military operations against the FARC and ELN in June through August of [1](#)2006.

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CURRENT FOCUS AREAS  
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[1](#)3. (S) In Plan Patriota's main effort, Joint Task Force Omega (JTF-O) continued its intensive campaign in La Macarena, western Meta department (ref C). Meta is a key FARC center of gravity -- a historical stronghold and former safe haven (despeje), a locus of coca cultivation, the likely current hideout of its military chief, and a back door to Bogota. The COLMIL's combined forces met stiff resistance in their operations to find and destroy FARC camps and caches. Intelligence indicated that local FARC fronts suffered supply shortages and desertions. While the FARC may not have its former free reign, however, its presence in the area remains formidable, as evidenced by the presence of its military chief "Mono Jojoy" with a substantial number of fighters.

[1](#)4. (S) Fighting in La Macarena will likely push the FARC back south into Caqueta. Resupply activity is already ongoing there via weekly flights from Venezuela and Brazil landing inside the Colombian border -- routes that are more roundabout but are free of COLMIL impediments. FARC fronts from Meta may migrate to central Caqueta to connect with those supplies. JTF-O would be hard pressed to counter those moves while fully engaged in Meta. The COLAR's Sixth Division is similarly tied down in constant combat in western Caqueta, where it killed dozens of enemy fighters. On the Huila border, the FARC's elite Teofilo Ferero Mobile Column

(TFMC) was weakened by COLAR pressure, coupled with a police operation that netted 21 members. TFMC attacks declined, and many members deserted.

15. (S) Antioquia Department in Colombia's northwest was a third zone of heavy combat against both FARC and ELN. The area is populous with a broad-based economy, providing groups with income from extortion as well as drug production. It falls under the COLAR's large Seventh Division, which consistently inflicts high enemy casualties. The area's already high battle tempo was further raised by the introduction of special forces, whose pursuit of FARC front commander and high value target (HVT) alias "Karina" generated four weeks of sustained anti-FARC operations. The ELN also suffered heavy blows from combat, desertions, and the capture of a veteran leader of three fronts.

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BORDERS NEED MORE ATTENTION  
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16. (C) In the Catatumbo region (Norte de Santander) bordering Venezuela, the COLMIL stepped up operations to protect the Cano-Limon pipeline, improve border integrity, address rampant contraband traffic, and reverse a spike in FARC attacks after paramilitary demobilization. The Second Division moved its headquarters forward, to pressure the local brigade to be more aggressive; a new mobile brigade (BRIM) increased offensive capability; and the State Department's NAS temporarily moved its helicopter base into the zone to provide air mobility. The COLMIL has yet regain control of the area, however, and the FARC still has the tactical advantage. Still, operations have taken a toll on the ELN, whose small fronts suffered heavy casualties including hits to their leadership. Greater COLMIL action in Catatumbo may push guerrillas' cross-border supply lines further north, where patrol is difficult due to sparse GOC presence and poor infrastructure.

17. (S) On the southern border, Putumayo's aggressive FARC 48th front used Ecuador as a refuge during combat and a leadership safe haven. Alleged COLMIL incursions into Ecuadorian territory and/or air space during operations caused friction between GOC and GOE. Coca cultivation increased in the no-spray border zone, and the largest number of guerrilla arrests were inside coca labs. All illegal groups expanded their presence in Narino, where COLMIL operations were limited by tough terrain and an almost total absence of state institutions and infrastructure. Colombian Army and Marines conducted successful operations but lacked the resources for sustained action or a fixed presence.

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